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## Progressive Country: How the 1970s Transformed the Texan in Popular Culture

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*Progressive Country: How the 1970s Transformed the Texan in Popular Culture* by Jason Mellard, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013) vi + 276 pgs

During the 1970s, Texas country artists began playing a new offshoot of country music today known as progressive country, which helped to define today's Austin music scene. Although the music itself signified the incoming change within the country music industry and Austin, historian Jason Mellard asserts that it was one of the most important mediums by which the image of the Texan was transformed in popular culture. In his *Progressive Country*, Mellard asserts that progressive country was the force by which Texans were able to reinvent their image in American culture. By combining aspects of the hippie and redneck image, progressive country artists and audiences embraced both extremes in order to find their own contradictory middle ground amongst strong criticisms of the Texan which had been increasing since the 1960s. This image eventually gained enough popularity that it was for a time embraced throughout America via a fashion trend known as Texas chic.

Despite the title, Mellard's narrative features less about the progressive country movement than about Texas' perceived role in American society during the 1960s and 1970s. He painstakingly sets the stage for the rise of progressive country by providing readers with how Texas society and culture evolved during the era, with an emphasis on the academy and politics. He acknowledges prominent academics' notions of the Texan, such as J. Frank Dobie, Walter Prescott Webb, who helped set a traditional standard of the Texan in American minds. He also notes the changing trends during the 1960s, as younger scholars like Americo Peredes challenged these traditional notions. During this same decade, the Texan featured prominently in politics. A president was assassinated in a Texan city, and following this tragedy, a Texan president led the United States through a very unpopular war. All of these events culminated in challenging the authenticity and justification of the Texan image. Yet through these means of bringing the Texan

to the depths of ardent criticism, Mellard is able to lift him up again as the embraced image of the progressive country movement. Mellard showcases this music scene as the Texan's rebirth in popular culture, which eventually gained enough prominence to spread to cities on the other side of the cultural spectrum, such as New York City. Through the progressive country movement, Mellard illustrates how the Texan was transformed from a negative image of redneck extremism to redneck chic, which culminated in the early 1980s urban cowboy trend.

Mellard's work is very thought out and clearly illustrated. His research is thorough and takes into account the varying aspects of cultural history. As a result, his narrative does not come across as too one sided and the reader is given a greater understanding of the nuances of both Texan and American cultures during this period. Despite these qualities, Mellard seems to overstate aspects of his argument at times. While the means by which he sets the stage for the rise of progressive country is admirable, the time devoted to it takes away from the actual progressive country movement. As a result only two chapters truly deal with the progressive country scene. Make no mistake, Mellard's work is an admirable narrative of how the Texan image was reinvented, more focus is ultimately given to setting the stage for the image's reinvention and its subsequent effects on American culture after it occurred.

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